

Who drives the agenda, media or parties? A seven-country comparison in the run-up to the 2014 European Parliament elections.

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Abstract

The long-lasting consensus Europe is a side- or even a non-issue in the public discourse has been challenged. Europe and European issues have gained attention. However, little research analyzed who drives this EU attention – the media or parties – what the optimal time lags for these influences are and, finally, how cross-national variations in these media–party interactions can be explained. To answer those questions, we rely on quantitative content analysis of newspaper articles and party press releases in seven countries (Austria, France, Germany, Greece, the Netherlands, Portugal, and the United Kingdom) during the twelve weeks prior to the 2014 European Parliament (EP) election. Our results from daily-level vector autoregression (VAR) analysis shows parties are the main driver and the influence occurs in most countries within a short timeframe of one day. However, our findings also indicate elite’s opinion polarization and elite’s EU salience cannot fully explain cross-national variations.

Keywords:

Agenda-setting, Election Campaign, Western Europe

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Since the 1990s, European integration as an elite-driven project has been increasingly politically contested (Hooghe and Marks 2008). The existent but so far quiescent differences in citizens' attitudes towards European integration (Van der Eijk and Franklin 2004: 32) have gradually been taken up by parties. Accordingly, political communication about the European Union (EU) has changed. Especially in times of European Parliament (EP) elections, not only media increases its coverage about the EU in terms of both "visibility and Europeaness" (Schuck et al. 2011: 50) but also parties attach higher salience to EU issues (Adam et al. 2017a; Adam and Maier 2011; 2016). Yet, few studies have focused on who drives this EU attention – either media or parties.

Research that focuses on party–media agenda-setting, i.e., the driving forces of issue attention, within a national context is abundant (Bartels 1996; Brandenburg 2002; Hopmann et al. 2012; Soroka 2002b; Walgrave and Van Aelst 2006). These studies show parties are the main agenda-setters, at least during national election times. The media play a more important role in routine times of politics. While the literature has mainly dealt with specific conditions under which either the media or parties prevail, few studies have paid attention to the reaction times (or lags) it takes the media to influence parties, and vice versa. Moreover, research at the EU level is missing. We address these gaps by exploring the interdependencies between the parties' and the media's agenda within the EP election context in seven Western European countries. We thereby ask whether the media or party agenda is the main driver of EU attention. By answering this question, we assess if findings from the national context can be adopted by the EU as well. We further focus on the reaction times between media and party communication as we assume party communication and media coverage affect each other over the course of the election campaign. Our second research question, therefore, asks which time lag best describes this mutual influence and whether reaction times of media and parties differ.

Our European perspective, especially the focus on the EP election, also offers new opportunities for agenda-setting research. So far, scholars have usually focused on one or two countries, using

additional countries as robustness checks and hardly conducted comparative studies (Van Aelst and Walgrave 2011). We investigate whether the interdependencies between the media and party agenda are uniform across countries, or whether we find systematic differences, and, if so, how we can explain them. In the EP election context, we start with two explanatory factors that could intensify the influence of the party on the media agenda, namely a country's elite polarization on EU integration and the elite's attention to European issues. Both factors are central for contestation about Europe and provide a convenient input for the media to follow EU issues put forward by parties. Our last research question addresses how exogenous factors affect the agenda-setting processes between media and parties and account for cross-national variation.

To answer these questions, we rely on a quantitative content analysis of news articles and party press releases (PRs) in seven countries published during the twelve weeks prior to the EP election 2014. We use vector autoregression (VAR) models to capture the interdependencies between party communication and media coverage. This approach allows us to estimate the causal impact of the party on the media agenda, and vice versa, to identify typical reaction times for these influences, and, finally, to compare the findings between countries.

Theoretical considerations

A main assumption in agenda-setting research is media coverage raises public awareness to issues, i.e., the more often an issue is covered in the media, the more salient this issue is for the public (Shaw and McCombs 1977). However, the media not only influences the public but also political actors, more specifically the salience they attach to issues (Lee 2014; Walgrave and Van Aelst 2016). Political actors need the media to connect with their voters. Therefore, they react to the agenda set by the media (Walgrave and Van Aelst 2016). As they "have professionalized their approach toward the media [...], they increasingly adhere to a media logic when communicating to the electorate"

(Hopmann et al. 2009: 73; Strömbäck et al. 2011). In other words, political parties are susceptible to issues that are salient in the media (Green-Pedersen and Stubager 2010; Soroka 2003; Thesen 2013). As previous research shows, the agenda-setting power of the media on political actors in routine times of politics is quite sizeable (for an overview see Walgrave and Van Aelst 2016).

But, research indicates the agenda-setting power of the media declines before elections. In times of election campaigns, political parties are more important compared to media for promoting issues on the agenda (Dalton et al. 1998; Eichhorn 1996 / 2005; Semetko et al. 1991). According to Walgrave and Aelst (2006), political actors behave differently as they want to convince voters and be accordingly covered in the media. Indeed, national election studies clearly show, in campaign times, parties are especially successful in putting their issues on the agenda (Brandenburg 2002: 46; Hopmann et al. 2012: 184; Norris et al. 1999; Roberts and McCombs 1994: 260; Semetko et al. 1991). However, agenda-setting research on the EU is lacking and it is not yet clear whether the above-mentioned findings can be transferred to a European election context. On the one hand, the only study we know that deals with the EU suggests media is the main driver. Maier et al. (2017) find media are more likely than parties to put an issue on the agenda, and to initiate the debate about the EU, at least when the trajectories and recurring patterns of specific issues, e.g., immigration, are traced. This might be the result of media-party agenda-setting, i.e., political actors react to specific news stories, and inter-media agenda-setting, as other media outlets take up a specific story leading to convergence in news coverage (Harder et al. 2017; Vliegenthart and Walgrave 2008). But Maier et al. (2017) do not analyze whether the overall media agenda also prevails in driving the party agenda, i.e., when all EU issues raised during the election campaign are considered. In this paper, we are not interested in the precise interplay of single EU issues between media (outlets) and individual parties but, rather, in line with traditional agenda-setting research in the interplay between the overall media and party agenda.

On the other hand, one could argue in favor of the party-media impact. The same agenda-setting mechanisms pursued by political parties and found in a national context could pertain, or even be more pronounced, in a European context for at least two reasons. First, since the EU on its own has little news value (Statham 2008), it needs to be promoted by political actors, such as parties or candidates, to be visible (Adam 2007; De Vreese 2003; Jalali and Silva 2011; Machill et al. 2006; Schuck and De Vreese 2011). Second, the introduction of the “Spitzenkandidaten” for the presidency of the European Commission (Van der Brug et al. 2016) personalized the 2014 EP election and led to a party-driven rise in media attention (Schulze 2016). Consequently, we state in our first hypothesis:

H1: The party agenda is the main driver of the media agenda in the 2014 EP election campaign.

We now move from the interdependencies between media and party agenda to the reaction time needed for one agenda to mirror changes in the other. Empirical research on reaction times is quite rare, even after the pioneering article by Bartels (1996). Inter-media agenda-setting research finds media outlets tend to react, on a daily basis, to changes in the overall media agenda (Golan 2006; Harder et al. 2017; Vliegenthart and Walgrave 2008). Typically, time lags range between one and two days. Especially, print media must react on a daily basis to new stories, events, and issues put forward by both political actors and other outlets due to the inherent “competition for audience” (Vliegenthart and Walgrave 2008: 861). This is even more the case in times of nearly instant online communication (Harder et al. 2017). This logic of competition can also be applied to the European context. Thus, we state the media’s reactions should be fast in addressing shifts in attention to EU issues.

H2a: The influence of parties on the media agenda occurs within one day

Agenda-setting research that focuses on interdependencies between political actors and media outlets shows circular effects occur within up to seven days (Bartels 1996). The reaction times of political actors to the media, especially in campaign times, is subject to a different logic of communication. On the one hand, campaign strategists are quick to follow events and media hypes (Elmelund-Praestekaer and Wien 2008). From a technical standpoint of strategic communication, parties could use strategic issue management to even anticipate issues and events in a campaign and react accordingly when these issues are raised in the media. On the other hand, they could also choose to be more reserved and bound to their own agenda and choose not to react to upcoming issues in the media (Seethaler and Melischek 2012), if it serves their campaign strategy narrative. Campaigns are meticulously planned in terms of issue-salience and issue-positions (Kleinnijenhuis and Nooy 2013) with professional spin doctors adding to strategic communication (Hopmann et al. 2009) over the course of a campaign. Based on our argumentation so far, i.e., the party agenda as the main driver, we think the second argument is more convincing, i.e., parties try to hold to their campaign strategy and issue agenda and are more reluctant to immediately react to media hypes and upcoming issues. Consequently, we would expect no influence of the media on the party agenda in the first place. However, in cases in which the media agenda has an impact on the party agenda, we expect the reaction times to be delayed as parties might aim to bring responses to the media in line with their campaign narrative. Our respective hypothesis is:

H2b: The influence of media on the party agenda takes longer than one day.

Explaining cross-national variations in the interdependencies between the media and party agenda

According to Walgrave and Aelst (2016), agenda-setting research, so far, has mostly neglected the comparative perspective between countries or used a multi-country design as mere robustness checks. As a result, few agenda-setting studies have focused on determinants that systematically explain cross-national variations in media-party-interactions (for an exception, see Vliegenthart et al. 2016). The focus on communication about Europe within the EP election setting provides a good opportunity to compare interdependencies in agenda-setting among countries as various countries hold the same election and allow for controlling for idiosyncrasies and different timing of national elections.

Since we expect parties to be the main agenda-setter in the EP election, we choose explanatory factors that reflect the intensity of contestation and importance of Europe for a country's political elite., i.e., the elite's polarization and elite's EU salience. First, the degree of elite polarization on EU issues could play a central role as a "catalyst" affecting the relation between the party and the media agenda. Following Gerhards (1993), the absence of conflict, more precisely party contestation and polarized opinions, is the main reason why the media paid little attention to the European integration, at least until the 1990s. In brief, EU issues simply lacked newsworthiness. However, the polarization of European integration at the national level has increased (Hutter et al. 2016) in the meantime for different reasons, such as the transfer of authority to the European level, constitutional reforms and new treaties, and the enlargement of the EU (e.g., Hooghe and Marks 2008). When elite opinions are polarized within a country, Europe adheres to the news value of conflict and media should be more likely to pick it up. Consequently, we would expect a party-driven interaction leading to the following hypothesis:

H3a: The more polarized elite opinions with regard to EU integration within a country, the more agenda-setting is driven by parties.

Second, the importance the elite devote to EU issues in their party communication, and salience, could further moderate the media-party-interactions. Research indicates the sheer extent of party communication matters. For instance, parties that communicate their issues more often have a higher chance to get into the media (e.g., on populist communication, see Schmidt 2017). However, the EP election setting is exceptional as national parties might further choose whether to address an issue at the national level or the EU level. Since the media does not only cover issues related to the EU but also domestic issues, the relative salience parties devote to EU issues could moderate the impact of the party on the media agenda. The more often a party addresses the EU in its party communication, the higher the probability of influencing the media. Of course, this effect depends not only on the party communication of one specific party but also a country's aggregated party communication. We expect:

H3b: The higher the elite's attention to issues with a European reference within a country, the more the agenda-setting process on such issues is driven by parties.

Data and Methods

This study focuses on media and party communication twelve weeks before the 2014 EP election. The EP election provides an extraordinary setting as it allows us to analyze not only whether findings from national contexts can be applied to the European context but also whether we find systematic cross-country variations in the same election context. We chose seven countries, namely Austria, France, Greece, Germany, the Netherlands, Portugal and the United Kingdom that vary concerning our main country-level determinants, namely elite polarization and elite attention to EU issues.

We rely on a quantitative content analysis of newspaper articles and party press releases. A common approach is to combine different communication channels to analyze the interdependencies between

the media and party agenda (Bartels 1996; Neuman et al. 2014; Vliegenthart and Montes 2014). While it is common to measure the media agenda based on news articles, we opted for press releases to measure party communication for two reasons: first, they are specifically targeted at the media and, second, they are not published on fixed schedules (e.g., parliamentary questionings), but potentially on a daily basis and better suited to capture reactions to external events or issues published in media (for a detailed discussion, see Maier et al. 2017). The selection of relevant articles and press releases is based on a search string containing at least two EU-related key words.¹

For the *media agenda*, we coded, for each country, all EU-related articles on the front page, political section, and commentaries published in one left-leaning and one right-leaning national newspaper, rotating them on a daily base. Up to three political actors, i.e., actors who formulate statements or perform an action and make a political opinion visible concerning a specific issue were coded per article. For the *party agenda*, we coded the EU-related press releases of national parties that achieved more than 3% of votes in the last national or 2009 EP election. The reliability scores, here Krippendorff's alpha, ranges between 0.76 to 1.00 for both sources (see Maier et al. 2016 for details concerning codebook, training, and reliability).

Our analysis is based on two-time series with data available at the daily level, one related to press releases and the other to political actors in the news. These time series allow us to capture “the [interdependent] dynamics of attention to issues over time” (Neuman et al. 2014: 198). For both agendas, we rely on information about the EU on an aggregated level, in terms of both actors and issues. In a nutshell, our data contains EU issues put forward in press releases and news on a given day per country.²

The independent variables at the country-level are measured as follows. First, we operationalize *elite opinion polarization* as the range between the two most extreme positions towards EU integration

taken by parties (for details, see Adam et al. 2017b: 8). The EU position is measured by an index, which accounts for all evaluations (positive, negative, and balanced) that a party directs in their press releases at concrete EU policies and EU actors as well as the general and fundamental idea of European integration, giving more weight to the latter. The index ranges between -1 (EU opposition) and +1 (EU support). Using the absolute difference between the most extreme party EU positions per country, elite opinion polarization ranges between 0 (no polarization) and 2 (high polarization). Second, *elite's attention to EU issues* is measured by the number of EU-related press releases in proportion to all published press releases by a party (see also Adam et al. 2017a).

In our sample, cross-national variations can be observed regarding both indicators. The highest *opinion polarization* can be found in the United Kingdom (1.2), followed by France (1.0) and the Netherlands (1.0). Countries such as Austria (0.8), Greece, and Germany (both 0.7) are in the middle. At the other extreme is Portugal, where elite polarization is hardly present (0.3). By contrast, *elite's attention to EU issues* is extraordinary high in Portugal with 56% of all press releases referring to the EU. Parties attach lower salience to the EU in Austria (34%), the Netherlands (32%), France (30%), and Greece (29%). Elite's EU attention is lowest in Germany (26%) and the UK (25%). The correlation between these two indicators is negative and relatively high (Pearson's $r = -0.76$).

Methods for analysis

We use vector autoregressive (VAR) analysis to assess the interdependencies between the media and party agenda, the temporal influences (i.e., time lags) and country variations. VAR models have gained importance in agenda-setting research recently (Bartels 1996; Lee 2014; Lee et al. 2016; Neuman et al. 2014; Soroka 2002a; Vliegenthart and Montes 2014). The advantages of VAR analysis are threefold. First, this method allows capturing the causality structure concerning the attention to EU issues in party communication and media. A key feature of VAR analysis is indeed the possibility

to “directly tackle the chicken and egg problem by assessing the chronological sequence between media coverage and political action” (Van Aelst and Walgrave 2011: 309-307, see also Neuman et al. 2014). Second, VAR analysis allows identifying potential time lags regarding the impact of party communication on media coverage, and vice versa. Third, VAR analysis is especially suited to account for interdependencies between both forms of communication in a single model as this method “treats the links across units in an unrestricted fashion” (Canova and Ciccarelli 2013: 207). In other words, VAR analysis treats all variables “as a priori endogenous” (Lütkepohl 2009: 281), meaning both party and media can influence each other in the same model and allows exploration of mutual influences in time series.

Our VAR analysis follows the common approach in the literature (e.g., Vliegenthart and Montes 2014). First, we test the main assumptions, such as stationarity and residual autocorrelation, and identify optimal time lags. Then, we proceed with a causal analysis using the *Granger causality tests* to detect whether and, if so, who follows whom in media-party-interactions. Finally, we investigate *cumulative impulse response functions (CIRF)* and *forecast error vector decomposition (FEVD)* to assess the direction and size of the influence (Beckett 2013; Lütkepohl 2009; Neuman et al. 2014: 203–4; Vliegenthart and Montes 2014: 328). More precisely, we check in a first step whether the main requirements for VAR analysis are given before conducting the VARs. A necessary criterion is that the data is stationary, i.e., the mean, variance, and autocorrelation of a variable should be constant over time.³ We examine this using the *Augmented Dickey-Fuller test* (for details, see, Lee et al. 2016: 448–49; Vliegenthart and Montes 2014: 328).⁴ We then assess the lag structure, i.e., how many days are needed for the influence to occur and select the optimal lags using two information criteria, namely the *Akaike Information Criterion (AIC)* and the *Hannan-Quinn Information Criterion (HQIC)*. Although the former is usually used in agenda-setting studies (e.g. Lee 2014; Vliegenthart and Montes 2014), it tends to overestimate the number of lags (see Lütkepohl 2005: 148–50).

Therefore, we use the HQIC as a second reference.⁵ We further test for residual autocorrelation using the *Lagrange-multiplier test* ex-post (see also, Becketti 2013: 313).

In a second step, we run VARs and then perform the Granger causality tests. One variable is said to cause a second variable if it improves the prediction of the second variable once its own past is considered (Granger 1969; Green-Pedersen and Stubager 2010; Lütkepohl 2005; 2009; Neuman et al. 2014; Vliegthart and Montes 2014). As Granger causality chi-square tests only give insights as to whether the effect is significant or not, we further rely on cumulative impulse response functions (CIRFs) to assess the direction and forecast error vector decompositions (FEVDs) to capture the size of the influence, i.e., the part of variation of one variable which is caused by shocks (or lags) of another variable (Becketti 2013; Vliegthart and Montes 2014). The estimation of CIRFs and FEVDs requires an understanding of the order of the variables since it matters which variable is added first (Becketti 2013; Sims 1980). Therefore, a sound theoretical argument should be made if a specific order is chosen in a structural recursive VAR (Lütkepohl 2009: 310–11). Although we assume parties influence the media, we controlled for influence the other way around to address the additional influence of parties after taking the past of media into account and calculate the VAR models for both causal directions. Therefore, there is a model for every country with media as a dependent variable (added first), PR added in second, and the other way around. When testing for direction and size of effects, e.g., of the party agenda on the media agenda, we add the dependent variable, here the media agenda, first to assess the remaining influence of the second (or independent) variable.⁶

Results

Starting with the description of our data, Figure 1 shows the trends in attention to EU issues in the run-up to the 2014 EP election in the seven countries. We look at the absolute numbers of press releases and political actors mentioned in news articles who refer to EU issues. We can summarize

two main findings as follows. First, references to EU issues that are across countries are, on average, more often present in the media as compared to press releases (also see descriptive statistics in appendix 2).⁷ The exception is Austria, where the number of press releases exceeds the number of EU issues in the media.⁸ Second, no constant trend towards the election day can be detected, but, rather, variations between countries. There is evidence for a slightly increasing trend in France and Portugal regarding party and media communication in contrast to the United Kingdom and Greece where either the media or party communication decreases. The next section tests whether systematic patterns between party communication and media coverage can be found.

[Figure 1 about here]

Overall interdependencies between party and media agenda

Our core interest is to disentangle the interdependencies between the party and media agenda. More specifically we focus on who influences whom, the lag after which this influence takes place and, finally, whether cross-national differences can be observed, and, if so, explained. In Table 1 the results from the VAR analysis based on all EU issues are presented for each country separately. As mentioned above, a main assumption of VAR analysis is the variables are endogenous and related to each other. For this reason, each VAR model contains just as much regressions as variables are included. In our case, two regressions, the first includes PRs as a dependent (or in VAR terms response) variable (see left-hand side of Table 1), the second are political actors mentioned in the media (see right-hand side).

[Table 1 about here]

The results in Table 1 support our first hypothesis that the overall party agenda is the main driver of media-party-interactions when all EU issues are considered. The Granger causality tests show for each country that press releases have a significant influence on the EU attention in the media, rather than the other way around. Table 1 provides further information on the lag selected in each country model. Therefore, we can assess our second hypothesis about the time length within which the media-party-interaction occur. As mentioned in the methodological section, the optimal lag structure was identified ex-ante before running our VAR models together with a test of the main assumptions. The second column in Table 1 suggests the optimal lag in most countries is one day and rather immediate. Both information criteria used for the lag selection, the AIC and HQIC, propose a lag of one day.⁹ This means the VAR models are best specified if the lag of one day is chosen. This lag-specific finding, combined with the previously discussed VAR results, supports our hypothesis 2a; the influence of the party on the media agenda is quite fast during campaign times. In other words, if the media agenda is influenced by the party agenda, it is the amount of press releases containing EU-references published the day before that matters. Only Austria is an exception with a proposed lag structure of two days.¹⁰ But, the inspection of the CIRF figures indicates the influence still occurs within a short period; the effect decreases considerably after two days, 0.24 additional mentioning in the media, and after three days, 0.06 additional media mentioning (see also CIRF figure 2). The evidence points that the party-media impact is also rather fast, within up to two days.

[Figure 2 about here]

Turning to Germany, the lag structure is ambiguous, resulting in two possible models including a one-day and a three-day lag.¹¹ We present the results for both VAR models. As discussed above, the findings for the German one-day model show the party agenda is the driver of the media agenda. This

is also the case for the three-day model. However, the results further suggest the media also affects the amount of press releases (see Granger-cause test on the left-hand side of Table 1). Yet, the influence is smaller as compared to the reverse party agenda influence and no significant variation in the party agenda can be attributed to lags of the media agenda, as the FEVD values show. These findings, provide only scant support for our hypothesis 2b: if the media influences the party agenda, longer time lags than one day should be considered.

Comparing the CIRF and FEVD values across countries allows a better understanding of the direction and size of the party-media-interaction. As Table 1 shows, the more press releases are published in the past, the more often EU references appear in the media. In Austria, for example, an additional press release results in 0.49 additional mentioning of the EU in the media after two days (see also figure 2). However, the influences are not uniform across countries, as differences in the CIRF and FEVD in Table 1 indicate. Moreover, two country groups can be distinguished. The first country group includes Portugal, the United Kingdom, and Austria, where all CIRFs values, even after eight days, as well as the FEVD at the selected lag are significant. FEVD accounts for the amount of remaining variation in the media agenda after having considered its own past, that is explained by the party agenda. The party agenda has the highest explanatory potential in the UK (24.1% after one day), followed by Austria (19.4% after two days) and Portugal (14.2% after one day). For the second country group, namely, France, Germany (model with 1-day lag), Greece, and the Netherlands, we cannot attribute any significant variation in the media agenda to the party agenda, even though the CIRF values point to a positive, but admittedly small influence of the party agenda on the media agenda.

So far, we have not only seen the party agenda influences the media agenda in a short time but also this influence varies between countries, being stronger in some countries as compared to others. We move forward to explain these differences by the degree of elite opinion polarization (H3a) and the

role of EU salience in party communication, i.e., parties' attention to EU issues as compared to non-EU issues (H3b). Table 2 gives an insight into how each country-level variable might be related to the interdependencies between the party and the media agenda.

[Table 2 about here]

The findings in table 2 indicate there is no linear trend. Neither differences in elite opinion polarization (H3a) nor parties' attention to EU issues (H3b) are systematically related to the influence of the party on the media agenda. However, we find the most extreme cases (regarding elite opinion polarization: the UK; regarding EU saliences: Portugal) are among those countries where the influence of the party on media agenda is substantial. The latter factor could also explain the case of Austria, the country with the second largest EU attention in party communication. Nevertheless, our hypotheses 3a and 3b fall short to explain the case of Germany. In addition, we cannot rule out whether it is the elite opinion polarization, parties' EU attention, or an inverse combination of both (i.e., high polarization combined with low EU salience, and vice versa) that is associated with the influence of the party on the media agenda. Despite the empirical support, at least for the UK and Portugal, we have to reject our hypotheses that elite polarization (H3a) or parties' EU salience (H3b) can fully explain cross-national variations.

Discussion

Our findings confirm previous research in national settings; parties are the main drivers of the agenda in times of election campaigns. The implications of the transferability of the results from the national to the EU context is actually good news for the EU and European integration, as this shows a trend towards normalization of EU-related political communication.

The best time lag to describe the mutual influences between party and media agenda is one day, yet keeping in mind this mainly stems from the media following party communication. These findings are again in line with previous research in national settings. Longer time lags can only be found for Germany where the media also influence the party agenda.

The German case could indicate not all parties react in the same way, but rather adopt different communication strategies, leading to our inconclusive results. At least three possible forms of parties' campaign strategies could be distinguished. First, in some cases, a party might choose to react instantaneously due to strategic issue management and to make the front page, resulting in mutual influence between parties and media. For this case, however, we do not find empirical evidence. Second, parties could decide to ignore upcoming issues in the media and stick to their planned campaign strategy, resulting in no reaction to the media at all. This campaign strategy is in line with the results for the other countries. Third, parties could be reluctant to media hypes and upcoming issues, but nevertheless react to them through positioning themselves in line with their campaign narrative, resulting in longer reaction times. This is what we find for Germany. When longer time lags are considered, the media also influence the party agenda. Further research at the party level is needed to provide a conclusive answer as to whether parties within a country apply different campaign strategies.

Our last research question aimed to explain variation between countries, in our case where the influence of the party agenda on the media agenda is more and less substantial, i.e., UK, Austria, Germany (3-day lag), and Portugal as compared to France, the Netherlands, Germany (1-day lag), and Greece. We focused on elite polarization and parties' EU salience as explanatory factors, which had no linear impact. Moreover, our results indicate combinations could matter. For example, parties' influence is quite high in the strongly polarized UK, although parties tend to avoid EU issues in their campaigns. By contrast, despite low levels of polarization, parties in Portugal's electoral campaign

heavily relies on EU issues. Austria has elements of both elite conflict and parties' EU salience, together with exceptionally intense party communication in general. In the absence (or presence) of polarization, parties might benefit from publishing a great number of PRs (or rarely communicating). Our findings indicate that instead of a "one-size fits all" solution, such as elite polarization or EU salience, combinations of factors, also beyond those we have studied, have to be taken into account. Based on the findings and limitations of this study, there are different areas for further research. First, future studies could have a stronger focus on explaining under which conditions the media might influence the party agenda. In this paper, we have aggregated all EU-related issues and focused on the EP election campaign period. However, research in national settings shows the media might be more important, and the driver, if specific issues, such as foreign politics or politics in routine times are considered (e.g., Soroka 2003; Walgrave and Van Aelst 2006).

Second, further research is needed to explain cross-national variations. Our findings show the influence of the party on the media agenda was not uniform across countries in the 2014 EP election. These findings might be applicable to national election contexts. Therefore, agenda-setting research, in general, should deal with explaining why agenda-setting power varies among countries more intensively. In this paper, we tested the role of the party elite. However, none of our explanatory factors, neither elite polarization nor the elite's EU attention, can satisfactorily explain differences between countries. One next effort could be to scrutinize actor- or party-centered factors. This could be either pursued by looking at factors at the country-level, as we have started to do, or to move to the party-level. Explanations could not only focus on parties' communication strategies, as mentioned above, reacting to the media as well as to other parties but also on specific party characteristics, such as positions towards and internal party consensus on European integration. In sum, we find the media agenda follows party communication in the 2014 EP election campaign straightaway. However, there are differences between countries that cannot be explained by a country's elite opinion polarization

and overall parties' EU salience. Thus, future agenda-setting research needs to address why the interdependencies between the media and parties vary.

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Figure 1: Trends of EU issue salience in the party and media agenda

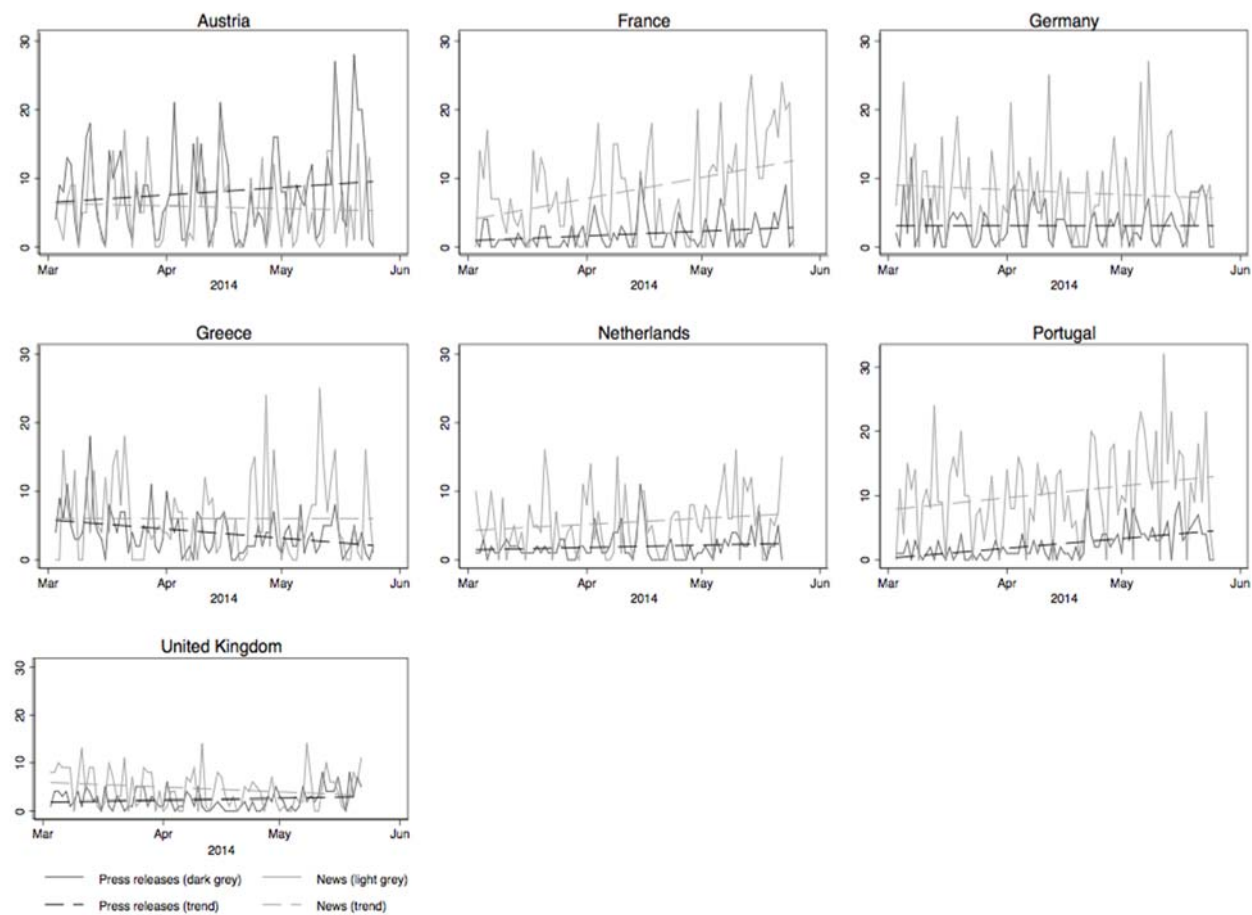


Table 1: Interdependencies between the party and media agenda

Dependent:	party agenda						media agenda					
County	Lag	Granger - <i>chi</i> ²	CIRF	FEVD and CI-bounds (95%)		<i>N</i>	Granger- <i>chi</i> ²	CIRF	FEVD and bounds (95%)		CI-	<i>N</i>
Austria	2	.054	—	.001	n.s.	673	22.002***	.490	.194	.045	.342	487
France	1	1.405	—	.013	n.s.	157	4.548*	.694	.043	n.s.		699
Germany	1	.559	—	.006	n.s.	257	11.442**	.773	.118	n.s.		675
Germany	3	9.456*	—	.036	n.s.	257	18.845***	.730	.151	.019	.283	675
								(n.s.)				
Greece	1	.737	—	.007	n.s.	331	4.575*	.424	.047	n.s.		506
Netherlands	1	.140	—	.002	n.s.	156	4.798*	.564	.054	n.s.		445
Portugal	1	2.374	—	.022	n.s.	204	15.167***	1.170	.142	.009	.274	876
UK	1	.150	—	.001	n.s.	193	26.782***	.934	.241	.080	.402	368

Notes: Results are displayed for the influences by the additional variable on the dependent with ***= $p < .001$. **= $p < .01$. *= $p < .05$ for the χ^2 sig. CIRF only reported if CI-bounds do not cross 0 (highlighted bold). Values for CIRF and FEVD's are dependent on the order of adding variables to the model. Thus, values in both columns represent the influence of adding the independent variable last. In addition, FEVD cannot be computed for 1-day lags since the dependent variable has an influence of 1 due to input ordering. In this case, additional effects of the lag+1 day (i.e., 2 days) are shown.

Reading example Austria from left to right: For a 2-day lag, the Granger causality test is non-significant (.054). So, adding Media does not improve forecasting and the CIRF and FEVD (.007) reflect that by its CI-Bounds crossing 0. With a 2-day lag for PR influencing Media the Granger causality χ^2 (22.002***) indicates PR improves the forecasts of media. After two days, an additional PR results in .490 mentions (CIRF) in News articles. For one random shock in PR 19.4% (FEVD .194) variation in media can be attributed (the borders of the confidence interval bounds should not cross zero to be significant at the 95% level; significant results are highlighted bold). Please note the results above stem from single VAR models for different countries with different total *N*. Thus, CIRFs values are only comparable within countries.

Source: Own data.

Table 2: The role of elite polarization and EU salience for explaining the interdependencies between the party and media agenda

Dependent:		party agenda						media agenda							
Elite Pol. (H3a)	County	Lag	Granger-chi²	CIRF	FEVD and CI-bounds (95%)		N	Granger-chi²	CIRF	FEVD and CI-bounds (95%)		N	EU sal. (H3b)		
1.2	UK	1	.150	–	.001	n.s.	193	26.782***	.934	.241	.080	.402	368	0.25	
1.0	France	1	1.405	–	.013	n.s.	157	4.548*	.694	.043	n.s.		699	0.30	
1.0	Netherlands	1	.140	–	.002	n.s.	156	4.798*	.564	.054	n.s.		445	0.32	
0.8	Austria	2	.054	–	.001	n.s.	673	22.002***	.490	.194	.045	.342	0.34	0.25	
0.7	Germany	1	.559	–	.006	n.s.	257	11.442**	.773	.118	n.s.		675	0.26	
0.7	Germany	3	9.456*	–	.036	n.s.	257	18.845***	.730 (n.s.)	.151	.019	.283	0.26	0.34	
0.7	Greece	1	.737	–	.007	n.s.	331	4.575*	.424	.047	n.s.		506	0.29	
0.3	Portugal	1	2.374	–	.022	n.s.	204	15.167***	1.170	.142	.009	.274	0.56	0.29	

Notes: ***=p<.001. **=p<.01. *=p<.05; Elite Pol = Elite polarization, EU sal. = EU salience, for further information, see table 1.

Source: Own data.

APPENDIX

Appendix 1: Overview of EU issues in press releases and the media

	AT			FR			DE			GR			NL			PT			UK									
<i>Issues (PRs and political actors in media articles)</i>	<i>PR</i>	<i>Media</i>	<i>Total</i>		<i>PR</i>	<i>Media</i>	<i>Total</i>		<i>PR</i>	<i>Media</i>	<i>Total</i>		<i>PR</i>	<i>Media</i>	<i>Total</i>		<i>PR</i>	<i>Media</i>	<i>Total</i>		<i>PR</i>	<i>Media</i>	<i>Total</i>		<i>PR</i>	<i>Media</i>	<i>Total</i>	
Economy	145	99	244	21%	73	178	251	29%	63	94	157	17%	151	199	350	42%	31	55	86	14%	111	442	553	51%	22	23	45	8%
Social and Labor	78	22	100	9%	11	9	20	2%	12	16	28	3%	51	28	79	9%	13	11	24	4%	47	81	128	12%	13	9	22	4%
Market Policy																												
Education and Research	11	4	15	1%	0	3	3	0%	5	2	7	1%	5	2	7	1%	0	6	6	1%	3	30	33	3%	3	1	4	1%
Law and Order	46	31	77	7%	7	17	24	3%	24	52	76	8%	2	3	5	1%	11	31	42	7%	3	30	33	3%	7	18	25	4%
Immigration	32	31	63	5%	7	56	63	7%	17	26	43	5%	8	26	34	4%	7	35	42	7%	2	22	24	2%	24	46	70	12%
International Affairs	56	172	228	20%	11	241	252	29%	50	295	345	37%	21	105	126	15%	12	120	132	22%	1	110	111	10%	23	97	120	21%
Culture and Other	25	3	28	2%	2	6	8	1%	5	9	14	2%	10	5	15	2%	2	5	7	1%	5	9	14	1%	1	2	3	1%
Environment and Energy	60	21	81	7%	8	9	17	2%	17	25	42	5%	16	24	40	5%	13	22	35	6%	7	12	19	2%	12	17	29	5%
Infrastructure	26	7	33	3%	1	4	5	1%	7	13	20	2%	3	5	8	1%	8	16	24	4%	5	12	17	2%	5	1	6	1%
Agriculture and Food	40	12	52	4%	3	11	14	2%	10	14	24	3%	6	2	8	1%	16	6	22	4%	13	14	27	3%	2	9	11	2%
Consumer Protection	29	0	29	3%	0	2	2	0%	9	6	15	2%	1	0	1	0%	4	1	5	1%	-	-	-	-	1	4	5	1%
Citizens' Rights	59	15	74	6%	7	6	13	2%	26	11	37	4%	21	10	31	4%	17	18	35	6%	0	22	22	2%	7	12	19	3%
Constitutional Questions and Functioning of EU	29	25	54	5%	19	94	113	13%	5	51	56	6%	18	29	47	6%	12	74	86	14%	3	81	84	8%	12	41	53	9%
Territorial questions	20	34	54	5%	2	34	36	4%	7	52	59	6%	6	15	21	3%	2	27	29	5%	0	8	8	1%	58	83	141	25%
Administration and bureaucracy (corruption)	17	11	28	2%	6	29	35	4%	0	9	9	1%	12	53	65	8%	8	18	26	4%	4	3	7	1%	3	5	8	1%
Total	673	487	1.160		157	699	856		257	675	932		331	506	837		156	445	601		204	876	1.080		193	368	561	

Source: Own data.

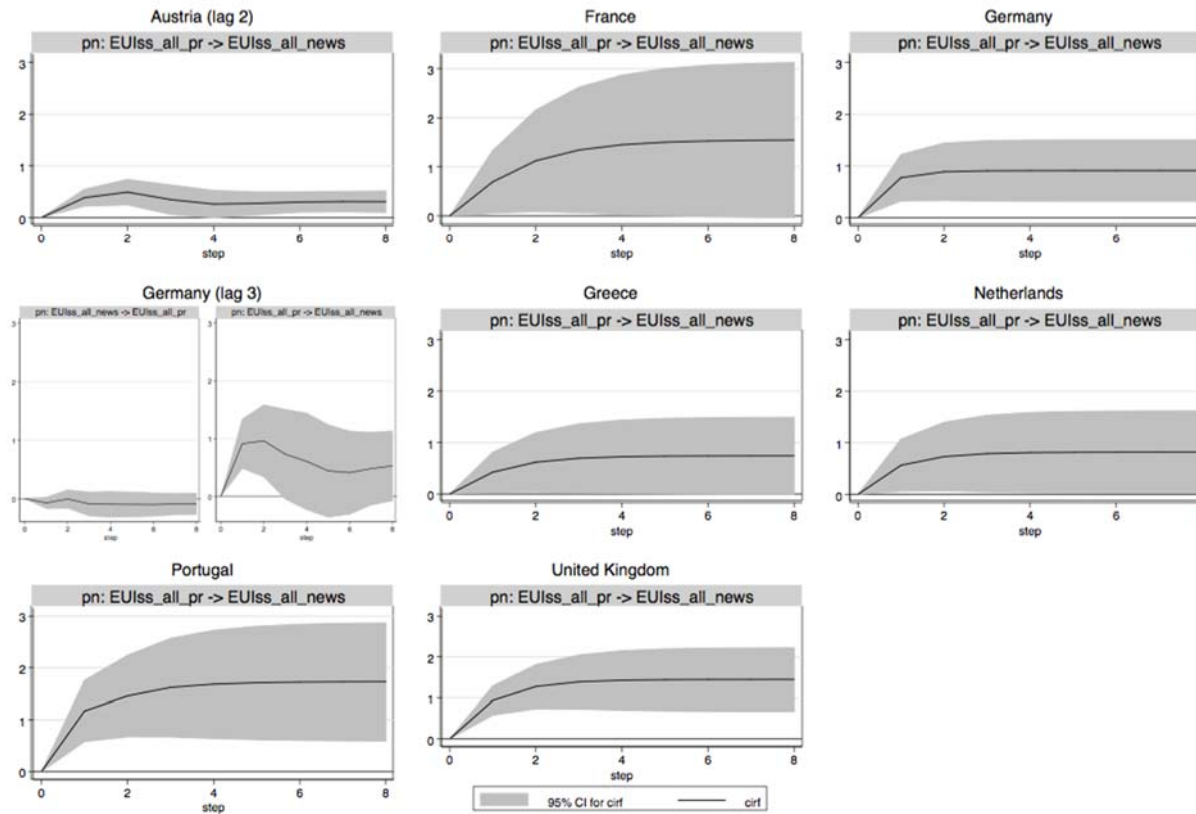
Appendix 2: Descriptive statistics of EU issue salience in the party and media agenda

	AT	FR	DE	GR	NL	PT	UK
Press releases (N)	673	157	257	331	156	204	193
Mean (<i>SD</i>)	8.0 (6.5)	1.9 (2.2)	3.1 (2.9)	3.9 (3.1)	1.9 (1.9)	2.4 (2.3)	2.4 (2.1)
Minimum, Maximum	[0, 28]	[0, 10]	[0, 13]	[0, 18]	[0, 11]	[0, 11]	[0, 8]
Political actors in media (N)	487	699	675	506	445	876	368
Mean (<i>SD</i>)	5.8 (4.9)	8.3 (6.8)	8.0 (6.3)	6.0 (5.9)	5.5 (4.4)	10.4 (6.9)	4.5 (3.9)
Minimum, Maximum	[0, 18]	[0, 25]	[0, 27]	[0, 25]	[0, 16]	[0, 32]	[0, 14]

Source: Own data

Appendix 2: CIRFs figures on the interdependencies between the party and media agenda

Cumulative impulse response functions (CIRFs)



Source: Own data.

Appendix 3. Test statistics regarding identification of lag structure and main assumptions such as stationarity, stability and residual autocorrelation

Identification of lag structure				Test of stationarity and stability ^b		resid autocorr ^b	
<i>County</i>	<i>Lag</i>	<i>AIC</i>	<i>HQIC</i>	<i>ADF PRs</i>	<i>ADF media</i>	<i>Eigenvalues inside unit circle</i>	<i>Lagrange- multiplier test</i>
Austria	2	12.223*	12.343*	-6,392	-6,331	yes	3,697
France	1	10.763*	10.835*	-6,435	-4,914	yes	6,429
Germany	1	11.276*	11.350*	-5,551	-6,586	yes	3,706
Germany (maxlag 14)	3	10.870*	11.072*	-5,452	-4,742	yes	6,460
Greece	1	11.354*	11.426*	-5,856	-5,491	yes	5,302
Netherlands	1	9.942*	10,015	-5,845	-5,589	yes	1,834
Portugal	1	11.093*	11.165*	-4,030	-5,387	yes	3,599
UK	1	9.589*	9.662*	-4,305	-5,923	yes	5,295

Notes: ***=p<.001. **=p<.01. *=p<.05;

^aAugmented Dickey-Fuller (ADF) tests and Lagrange-multiplier tests indicates stationarity, non-unit-root, and no residual autocorrelation by confirming the null hypothesis (i.e., not being significant)

Reading example for Austria: Two days are needed for changes of one variable to be reflected in the other, whereas AIC and HQIC are both significant at p<.05. ADF and Lagrange tests (testing remaining autocorrelation) are non-significant, stationarity and stability are given. Eigenvalues are inside the unit circle indicate non-unit-root, i.e., stability.

Source: Own data.

¹ The key words in the search string, here the English version, include Europ*, europ*, EU, EP, EC, ECB EIB ESM EFSF EFSM ECJ EEAS EESC EIF EDPS EMU Troika troika Frontex, and constitutional treaty.

² In line with other studies, we dropped issues related to “elections” and “other” (for the issue categories and codebook, see (Maier et al. 2016) as the former includes among others date of the election or technicalities rather than substantial discussions on EU issues, while the latter is a residual category (e.g., Hopmann et al. 2012).

³ The process is stationary “if its first and second moments [...] are independent of t. [...] Additionally, stationary of a VAR requires a stability condition that we test only after we estimate the VAR [via unit root checks]” (Beckett 2013: 313).

⁴ We also check whether the data is stable, i.e., not affected by an underlying trend or impact of a third variable excluded in the model. Stability is achieved if the VAR has no unit root, i.e., all the eigenvalues are within the unit circle (for details, see Lütkepohl 2005: 15).

⁵ The general rule of thumb is to start with four lags and add or decrease lags according to the information criteria and stability tests (i.e., whether there is residual autocorrelation or unit root left, Beckett 2013). Starting with a four-day lag structure and going up to fourteen days, we compared AIC and HQIC to decide on the optimal time lags.

⁶ The VAR models presented in the next chapter are estimated using Stata (for an overview on relevant commands, see Abrigo and Love 2015 and Beckett 2013).

⁷ The results are the same, even if only one actor per article is coded rather than up to three actors.

⁸ The case of Austria displays high numbers of press releases due to specific institutional settings in party campaigning (see also, Kritzing et al. 2014: 328–29).

⁹ These test statistics are satisfactory for all presented models, only in the Dutch model, the HQIC is not significant at lag 1. Thus, the results of the Dutch VAR should be interpreted with caution (see appendix 3).

¹⁰ The inspection of the VAR coefficients in the model with the media agenda as dependent variable indicates that the coefficient relating to press releases lagged by one day is significant but not the two-day lagged coefficient. However, these regression coefficients should be interpreted carefully. Because of multicollinearity, for instance between the lags of the same variables, the coefficients might be biased (see also Vliegthart and Montes 2014: 329).

¹¹ Since identification procedure of the lag structure starts with the longest chosen lag, the test statistics are sensitive to the number of chosen lags (Beckett 2013: 306). When we start with four lags the AIC and HQIC propose a one-day lag. Yet, when increasing the number of lags to a maximum of fourteen, both information criteria suggest a three-day lag.